

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT

in the name of

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of

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for

A Device Registration Mechanism

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A Device Registration Mechanism

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to remote device registration, and more particularly to automated remote device registration which automatically transmits pertinent data to a remote computer.

BACKGROUND

Intelligent devices are employed in various areas today. These devices are utilized in building control and automation systems, power generation systems, industrial controls, and so forth. When these devices are deployed in the field, they often need to communicate with a remote computer system, which monitors information from these devices or controls the devices themselves.

The proliferation of the Internet, home networks, and wireless technology are some of the driving forces behind the increased use of these devices, as the cost of connecting them is dropping quickly.

When configuring these devices, the user must manually register them once they are connected to the network that attaches the device to the remote computer. As the use and number of these devices increase, an automatic method of registering these devices and establishing communication is needed, as it is not feasible to manually maintain device information.

SUMMARY

According to an aspect of this invention, an automated device recordation and registration process for automatically registering, on a remote computer, an embedded device includes a feature detection process for detecting feature information associated with a device to be registered. A feature transmission process transmits the feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language. A registration process registers the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer.

One or more of the following features may be included. The self-describing computer language includes eXtensible Markup Language (XML). The known address is a

Uniform Resource Locator (URL). The known address is a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) address. The feature information includes a device type and a device instance. The device type is a model number and the device instance is a serial number. The remote computer includes a database for storing the feature information. The device registration process includes a device registration status process for examining the database to determine if the device was previously registered on the remote computer and initiating the registration process if the device is not registered. The remote computer resides on a distributed computing network and the feature transmission process transmits the feature information to the remote computer via the distributed computing network. The distributed computing network is the Internet. The device is connected to the distributed computing network via a direct network connection. The device is connected to the distributed computing network via a dial-up network connection. The device is connected to the distributed computing network via a wireless network connection.

One or more of the following features may be included. The device includes embedded software which controls the device's functionality, where the embedded software has a specific version identifier associated with it. The database stores a software update, having a specific version identifier associated with it, for the embedded software of the device, where the software update is the newest version of embedded software available for the device. The device registration process includes a software comparison process for comparing the version identifier of the software update to the version identifier of the embedded software of the device to determine if the embedded software of the device needs to be updated. The device registration process includes a software update process, responsive to the software comparison process determining that the embedded software needs to be updated, for updating the embedded software residing on the device with the software update.

One or more of the following features may be included. The feature information includes system information concerning the location, ownership, and configuration of the device. The device registration process includes a system information interface for allowing the owner of the device to configure the system information. The device includes a HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) device web server and the system information interface is a software application residing on the device web server, where the owner of the device

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can edit the system information of the device by accessing the system information interface via a remote web client. The device registration process includes a system information transmission process for transmitting the system information to the remote computer using the self-describing computer language and for storing the system information on the database of the remote computer. The system information transmission process includes a system information comparison process for comparing the system information on the remote computer to the system information on the device to determine if the database on the remote computer needs to be updated with the system information on the device. The system information transmission process includes a system information upload process, responsive to the system information comparison process determining that the system information on the database needs to be updated, for updating the system information on the database with the system information on the device.

One or more of the following features may be included. The device includes a device web client and the remote computer includes a HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) remote web server. The remote computer includes an application logic to interface the remote web server and the database. The feature transmission process utilizes the device web client to upload the feature information from the device to the remote web server, where the application logic transfers the feature information from the remote web server to the database. The device includes a device mail client and the remote computer includes a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) remote mail server. The remote computer includes an application logic to interface the remote mail server and the database. The feature transmission process utilizes the device mail client to upload the feature information from the device to the remote mail server, where the application logic transfers the feature information from the remote mail server to the database.

According to a further aspect of this invention, a computer implemented method for registering, on a remote computer, a device embedded in an apparatus, includes detecting feature information associated with a device to be registered. The method transmits the feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language. The method registers the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer.

One or more of the following features may be included. The computer implemented method further includes examining the database to determine if the device was previously registered on the remote computer and initiating the registration process if the device is not registered. The computer implemented method includes comparing the version identifier of the software update to the version identifier of the embedded software of the device to determine if the embedded software of the device needs to be updated. The computer implemented method includes updating the embedded software residing on the device with the software update if it is determined that the embedded software needs to be updated. The computer implemented method further includes transmitting the system information to the remote computer using the self-describing computer language and storing the system information on the database of the remote computer. The computer implemented method further includes comparing the system information on the remote computer to the system information on the device to determine if the database on the remote computer needs to be updated with the system information on the device. The computer implemented method further includes updating the system information on the database with the system information on the device, if it is determined that the system information on the database needs to be updated.

According to a further aspect of this invention, a computer program product residing on a computer readable medium having a plurality of instructions stored thereon which, when executed by the processor, cause that processor to detect feature information associated with a device to be registered. The computer program product transmits the feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language. The computer program product registers the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer.

According to a further aspect of this invention, a processor and memory are configured to detect feature information associated with a device to be registered. The processor and memory transmit the feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language. The processor and memory register the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer.

One or more advantages can be provided from the above. The user may quickly and easily register numerous devices. The user can configure devices without having to manually

establish a communication link between the devices and the remote computer. The user can register devices without having to manually enter device-specific information into the remote computer. The devices may be automatically reconfigured with updated software packages. The user may remotely administer all devices using a standard web browser.

5 The details of one or more embodiments of the invention are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below. Other features, objects, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the description and drawings, and from the claims.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagrammatic view of the device registration process;

10 FIG. 2 is a flow chart of the device registration method;

FIG. 3. is a diagrammatic view of another embodiment of the device registration process, including a processor and a computer readable medium, and a flow chart showing a sequence of steps executed by the processor; and

15 FIG. 4. is a diagrammatic view of another embodiment of the device registration process, including a processor and memory, and a flow chart showing a sequence of steps executed by the processor and memory.

Like reference symbols in the various drawings indicate like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to Fig. 1, there is shown an automated device recordation and registration
20 process 10 for automatically registering, on a remote computer 12, an embedded device 14. Process 10 typically resides on and is incorporated into device 14. Device 14 is connected to a distributed computing network 16. Link 17, which connects device 14 to distributed computing network 16, can be any form of network connection, such as: a dial-up network connection via a modem (embedded into device 14); a direct network connection via a
25 network interface card (embedded into device 14); a wireless network connection via any form of wireless communication chipset (embedded into device 14); and so forth. Distributed computing network 16 could be the Internet, an intranet, an extranet, a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), or any other form of network.

Process 10 includes feature detection process 18 for detecting feature information 20
30 associated with the device 14 to be registered. Feature information 20 is stored in device 14

includes a device instance 24 (typically a serial number), device registration status process 36 will examine database 32 to see if a record 34 exists on database 32 for device 14. In the event that device 14 has not been registered on database 32 (or the information on database 32 is incorrect/outdated), device registration status process 36 will initiate registration process 30 to register device 14 on database 32. This process 36 can be instituted at various times to ensure that device 14 is registered on database 32. For example, each time device 14 is powered-up (i.e. the device power is turned on), device registration status process 36 can determine whether device 14 is registered on remote computer 12. Accordingly, whenever a device 14 is initially installed and powered-up, registration is automatic; as device registration status process 36 will communicate over distributed computing network 16 and check remote computer 12 to determine if device 14 is registered on database 32. This results in a system in which registration is automatic.

Device 14 includes embedded software 38 which controls the functionality of device 14. Device 14 can be any of a large number of possibilities. Typical examples of device 14 might be: valve actuators in industrial controls; damper actuators in building automation systems; switch actuators in power generation systems; and so forth. Accordingly, the functionalities that embedded software 38 in these particular devices 14 would control are: the opening and closing of the valve; the opening and closing of the damper; and the opening or closing of the switch, respectively. As with most software packages, a software version number 40 is associated with embedded software 38 to facilitate easy software version comparison. Database 32 stores a software update 42 having a specific software version number 44 associated with it, where software update 42 is the newest version of embedded software 40 available for device 14.

Software comparison process 46 compares the version identifier 40 of embedded software 38 to the version identifier 44 of software update 42 to determine if the software update is newer (e.g. has a higher or newer version identifier) than the embedded software 38 installed on device 14. In the event that software comparison process 46 determines that software update 42 is newer than embedded software 38, embedded software 38 will be updated with software update 42.

Software update process 48, which is initiated in response to software comparison process 46 determining that embedded software 38 needs to be updated, retrieves software

update 42 from remote computer 12 via distributed computing network 16. Accordingly, software update 42 is installed of device 14 by software update process 48 and embedded software 38 is either deleted, deactivated, or overwritten.

Device 14 includes a HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) device web server 50. System information interface 52 resides on device web server 50 and is written in a language executable by device web server 50 (e.g. CGI, ISAPI, Java Servlets, ASP, and so forth). System information interface 52 allows the owner 54 of device 14 to access and edit system information 26 via some form of remote web client 56 executed on remote workstation 57. Examples of remote web client 56 would be any form of web browser (e.g. Microsoft Internet Explorer™, Netscape Navigator™, and so forth), or any form of custom application interface which allows owner 54 to access and modify system information 26 stored on device 14.

Whenever user 54 modifies system information 26 via system information interface 52, system information transmission process 54 transmits this “newly modified” system information 26 from device 14 to remote computer 12 for storing in database 32. System information transmission process 54 transmits system information 26 to remote computer 12 using a self-describing computer language, such as eXtensible Markup Language (XML).

System information transmission process 54 includes system information comparison process 56 for comparing system information 26 stored on device 14 to the system information (shown a “S” in item 34) stored on database 32 of remote computer 12 to determine if database 32 needs to be updated. As system information 26 is “owner editable” by owner 54, in the event that the system information on device 14 differs from the system information of database 32, database 32 needs to be updated with system information 26.

System information transmission process 54 includes a system information upload process 58. In the event that system information comparison process 56 determines that the system information on device 14 varies from the system information on database 32, system information upload process 58 transmits system information 26 from device 14 to remote computer 12 via distributed computing network 16. Accordingly, system information 26 is stored on database 32 of remote computer 12 and the “outdated” system information is either deleted, deactivated, or overwritten.

Device 14 includes a device web client 60 and remote computer 12 includes a HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) remote web server 62. Application logic 64 interfaces remote web server 62 and database 32. Feature transmission process 28 utilizes device web client 60 to upload feature information 20 from device 14 to remote web server 62.

5 Application logic 64 transfers feature information 20 from remote web server 62 to database 32.

Device 14 includes a device mail client 66 and remote computer 12 includes a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) remote mail server 68. Application logic 64 interfaces remote mail server 68 and database 32. Feature transmission process 28 utilizes device mail client 66 to upload feature information 20 from device 14 to remote mail server 68. Application logic 64 transfers feature information 20 from remote mail server 68 to database 32.

Now referring to Fig. 2, there is shown a method 100 for registering, on a remote computer, a device embedded in an apparatus. A feature detection process detects 102 feature information associated with a device to be registered. A feature transmission process transmits 104 that feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language. The self-describing computer language includes eXtensible Markup Language (XML) and the known address can be a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), a Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) address, and so forth. A registration process then registers 106 the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer. The remote computer includes a database for storing this feature information. The feature information can include many different pieces of information associated with the device itself, such as: a device type which specifies the device name or model number (e.g. "OCD 950" or "HimaLaya") of a device; a device instance which specifies a serial number of the device or some other unique identifier (such as a UUID Universally Unique Identifier); and system information which specifies various pieces of device or owner specific information (e.g. owner name, device location, device software version, etc.).

A device registration status process examines 108 the database to determine if the device was previously registered on the remote computer. If the device is not registered, the device registration status process initiates 110 the registration process. The device includes

Now referring to Fig. 4, there is shown a processor 200 and memory 202 configured to detect 204 feature information associated with a device to be registered. Processor 200 and memory 202 transmits 206 the feature information to a remote computer at a known address using a self-describing computer language, and registers 208 the device by storing the feature information on the remote computer.

Processor 200 and memory 202 may be incorporated into a personal computer 210, a programmable logic controller 212, a single board computer 214, or an array of network servers 216.

A number of embodiments of the invention have been described. Nevertheless, it will be understood that various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS: